
THE CREATION AND DIFFUSION OF GLOBAL CONSUMER CULTURE – A WAY TO INCREASE THE FIRM COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract:

This article considers how the culture in which we live creates the meaning of everyday products and how these meanings move through a society to consumers. The advertising and fashion industries help to transfer meanings by associating functional products with symbolic qualities such as sophistication or just plain cool. These goods, in turn, impart their meanings to consumers as they use these products to create and express their identities. It is evidently that one of the fundamental premises of the modern field of consumer behaviour is that people often buy products not for what they do, but for what they mean.

Keywords: consumer culture, culture production process, innovation

The food we eat, the cars we drive, the clothes we wear, the places we live and work, the music we listen to – all are influenced by the ebb and flow of popular culture and fashion.

Consumers may at times feel overwhelmed by the total number of choices in the marketplace. A person trying to decide on something as routine as a necktie has many hundreds of alternatives to choose from. Despite this seeming abundance, the options available to consumers at any point in time actually represent only a small fraction of the total set of possibilities. The selection of certain alternatives over others (whether automobiles, dresses, computers, political candidates or even scientific methodologies) is the culmination of a complex filtration process resembling a funnel. (see figure 1)

Our tastes and product preferences are not formed in vacuum. Choices are driven by the images presented to us in mass-media, our observation of those around us, and even by our desires to live in the fantasy worlds created by marketers. These options are constantly evolving and changing. A clothing style or type of cuisine that is hot one year may be out the next year.

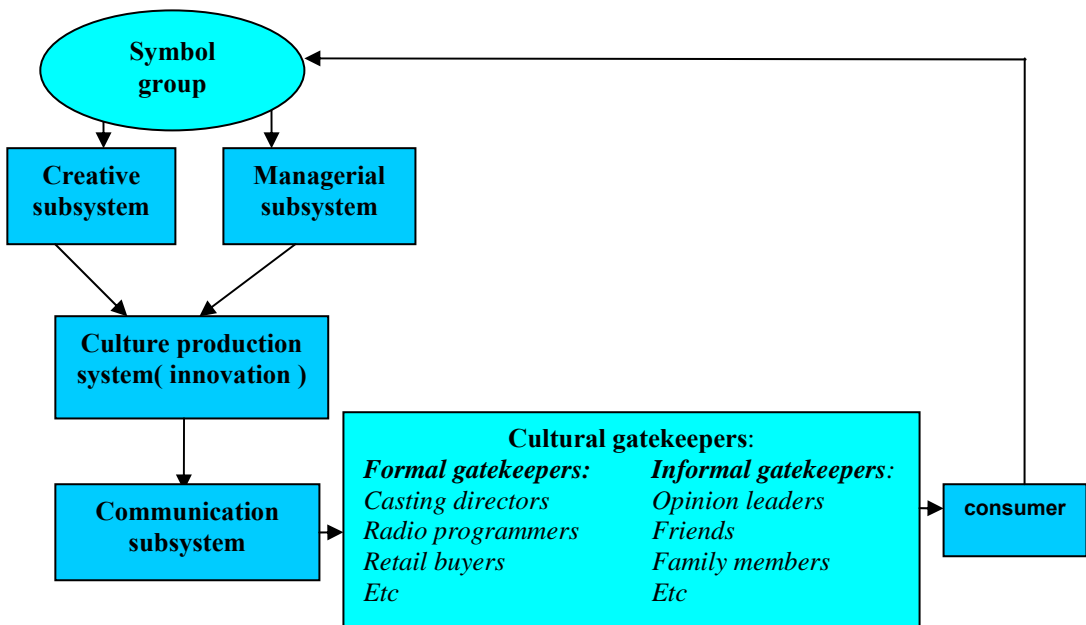


Figure 1: The culture production process

No single designer, company or advertising agency is totally responsible for creating popular culture. Every product, whether a hit record, a car or a new clothing style requires the input of many different participants. The set of individuals and organizations responsible for creating and marketing a cultural product is a culture production system.

The nature of these systems helps to determine the types of products that eventually emerge from them. Factors such as the number and diversity of competing systems and the amount of innovation versus conformity that is encourage are important. The different members of a culture production system may not necessarily be aware of or appreciate the roles played by other members, yet many diverse agents work together to create popular culture. Each member does his or her best to anticipate which particular images will be most attractive to a consumer market. Of course, those who are able to consistently forecast consumers' tastes most accurately will be successful over time.

A culture production system has three major subsystems:

- a creative subsystem responsible for generating new symbols and products ;
- a managerial subsystem responsible for selecting, making tangible, mass producing and managing the distribution of new symbols and products;
- a communication subsystem responsible for giving meaning to the new product and providing it with a symbolic set of attributes that are communicated to consumers.

All of us have lived during a period of constant flux, so that, without thinking much about it, we tend to accept and expect change in our lives. We share these type

of changes with huge numbers of people – these are the cultural shifts that have the major impacts on consumer behaviour in the marketplace. Changes in the consumer market sometimes occur suddenly, as in the case of fashion, but more often they tend to move slowly into the lives of more and more people until they are recognized as having arrived. This process of acceptance across a society is known as diffusion. The diffusion of innovation refers to the manner in which new ideas, products, or practices spread through a culture. It represents the fundamental manner in which entire societies change and grow. There are three major types of innovation:

- a discontinuous innovation is the most significant type. This is a new product or service that represents a major change in the benefits offered to consumers and in the behaviours necessary for them to use the product. Examples include the automobile, airplane, radio, personal computer.
- a dynamically continuous innovation is a moderate – level category, in that consumers have to alter their behaviours somewhat for this type of product, but not too greatly. Examples include electric toothbrushes, self correcting typewriters, etc
- a continuous innovation represents the least degree of change from current consumer practices. Examples include new models of automobiles, new flavours, etc.

This topic is challenging because experience has shown that the diffusion process is not an automatic one – most new ideas do not diffuse through the population. Instead they are rejected and disappear from view. This often happens even when a new idea or product is clearly an improvement over current practices.

References:

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